

HEROIC DEATH OF PIC TON.

171

Key was now sent with 10,000 cavalry to break the right wing of Wellington. The French cavalry, in their attack on the right centre of the British line, were not supported by infantry, and made several desperate attacks upon our infantry, who immediately formed into square, and maintained themselves with the most determined courage and coolness. During these various charges upon the squares the French cuirassiers displayed great intrepidity, riding up to the ranks, and actually cutting at the bayonets with their swords, and firing at the officers.¹ The artillery, which was somewhat in front, kept up a well-directed fire upon them as they advanced, but, on their nearer approach, the gunners were obliged to retire into the squares, so that the guns were actually in momentary possession of the French cavalry, who could not, however, keep possession of them, or even spike them, if they had the means, in consequence of the heavy fire of musketry to which they were exposed. The French accounts state that several squares were broken, and standards taken, which is incorrect; on the contrary, the small squares constantly repulsed the cavalry, whom they generally allowed to advance close to their bayonets before they fired. The cuirassiers were then driven back with loss on all points,

could be idle at such a moment. His body was therefore placed beneath a tree by which it could readily be found when the fight was done.

When the sanguinary struggle had ceased, and the victorious English were called back to the field of battle, leaving the Prussians to pursue the enemy, Captain Tyler went in search of the body of his old General. He found it easily.

Upon looking at the dress of Sir Thomas Picton on the evening of the 18th, a few hours after his death, it was observed that his coat was torn on one side. This led to a further examination, and then the truth became apparent: — on the 16th he had been wounded at Quatre Bras; a musket-ball had struck him and broken two of his ribs, besides producing, it was supposed, some internal injuries; but, expecting that a severe battle would be fought within a short time, he kept this wound secret, lest he should be solicited to absent himself. From the moment he had left this country until he joined the army he had never entered any bed — he had scarcely given himself time to take any refreshment, so eager was he in the performance of his duty. After the severe wound which he had received he would have been justified in not engaging in the action of the 18th. His body was not only blackened by his first wound, but even swelled to a considerable degree:

and those who had seen it wondered that he should have been ^{able} to take part in the duties of the field " (*Memoirs of Sir T. Picton*). The Duke of Wellington himself assured me at the Congress of Verona (1822) that he had never seen in war anything so admirable as the ten or twelve repeated charges of the French cuirassiers on the troops of all tranches («Tomim, *Precis de la Campagne de 1815*).